

I - Opening



Four Paintings Expressing Awareness of Self-Identity as a Dynamic Inclusion of Natural Neighbourhood

By Alan Rayner

At the 'Little Gallery', Bathford Community Café

End December 2013 – February 2014

ACCOMPANYING NOTES

Introduction

So far as I can recall, I have always felt a close kinship with Nature. I have recognised that what is all around me cannot be isolated from and is just as vital to who and how I am as what is inside me. It is also continually changing. This recognition has inspired my colourful oil paintings of imaginary scenes. These scenes come to my mind 'out of the blue', in dreams or daydreams, but are also informed by careful biological study. As paint flows from my brush, I feel exhilarated by recognising that if we view them closely enough, and for long enough, all natural forms, my self included, are continually on the move. A mobile, *informative* presence (energy) takes shape *somewhere* within and around local regions of a still, *receptive* presence (space) *everywhere*. Paint pigment combined with a slippery medium (oil) *flows into place* from strokes of my brush onto board or canvas.

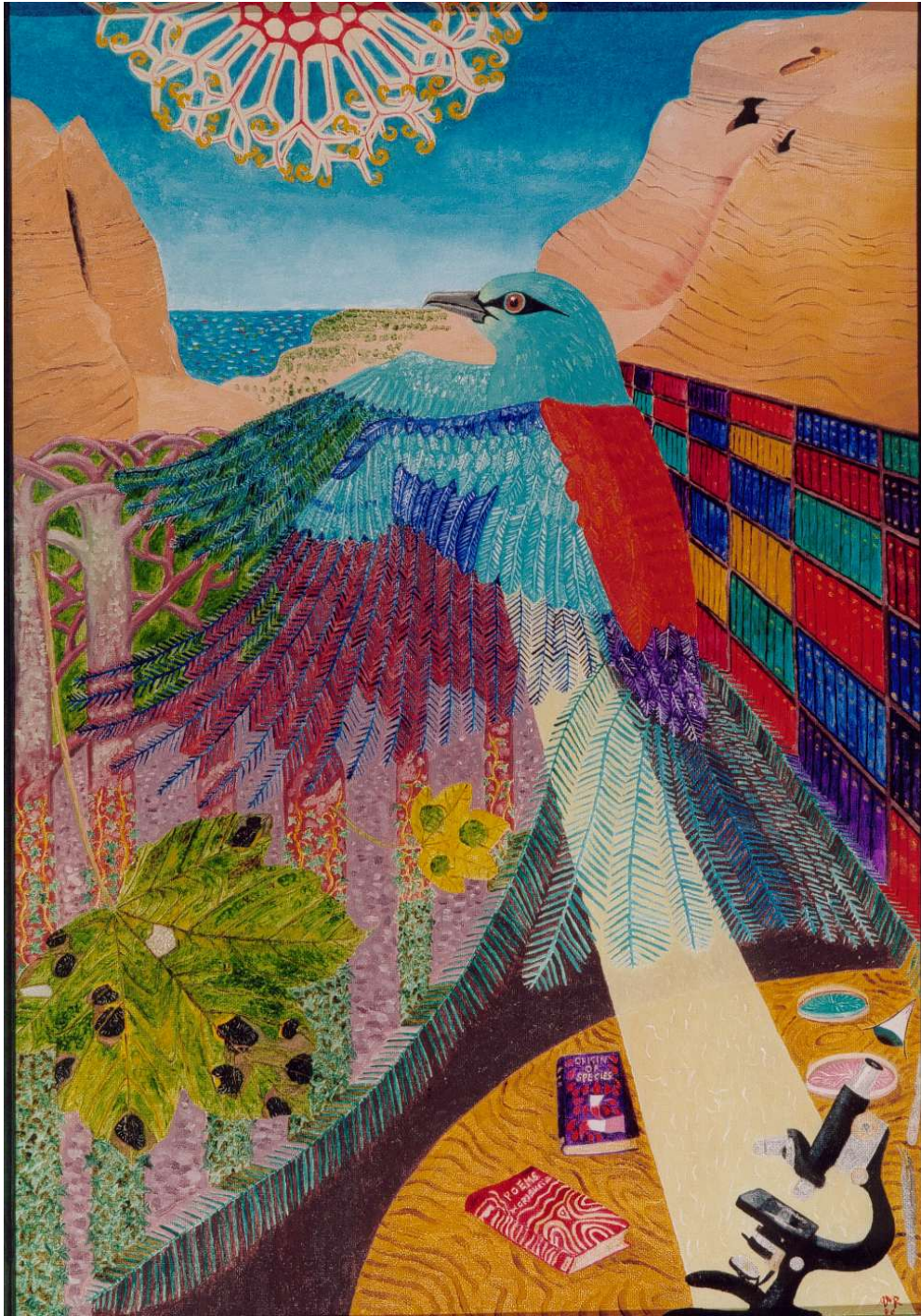
Having felt this sense of my self as continually *flowing into place* since childhood, it has come as a great surprise and source of dismay to me to become aware that most people in our adversarial modern ‘me or you’/ ‘us or them’ cultures apparently don’t feel the same way. Instead, it seems that most regard their selves and others as if they were sealed units, i.e. as discrete objects set apart from one another and Nature by hard-line boundaries and gaps of space. Nowhere has this *abstract* sense of *discontinuity* of ‘each from the other’ been more prevalent than in modern science, which is founded on the assumption that ‘one thing cannot simultaneously be another thing’. This assumption is embedded in Darwin’s view of ‘natural selection’ as ‘the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life’, and is associated with the idea that evolutionary success is dependent on the competitive elimination of others. Even Albert Einstein declared that ‘the environment is everything that isn’t me’. Forty years ago, as an apprentice natural scientist myself, I expressed my dismay with this alienating view and its repercussions in a painting called ‘Arid Confrontation’:



Just a year earlier, in more optimistic mood, I had recalled the vibrancy and ‘surprise element’ of a semi-wild Kenyan riverside garden that I experienced as a young child, in a painting called ‘Tropical Involvement’:



Nowadays, in 'active retirement', I am continuing to try to communicate the need to have or develop a scientific and personal awareness of human self-identity as a fluid inclusion of our natural neighbourhood. I see this awareness of 'natural inclusion' as vital to human flourishing in a healthy, life-sustaining environment. The four more recent paintings displayed in this little exhibition all reflect a different aspect of this awareness.



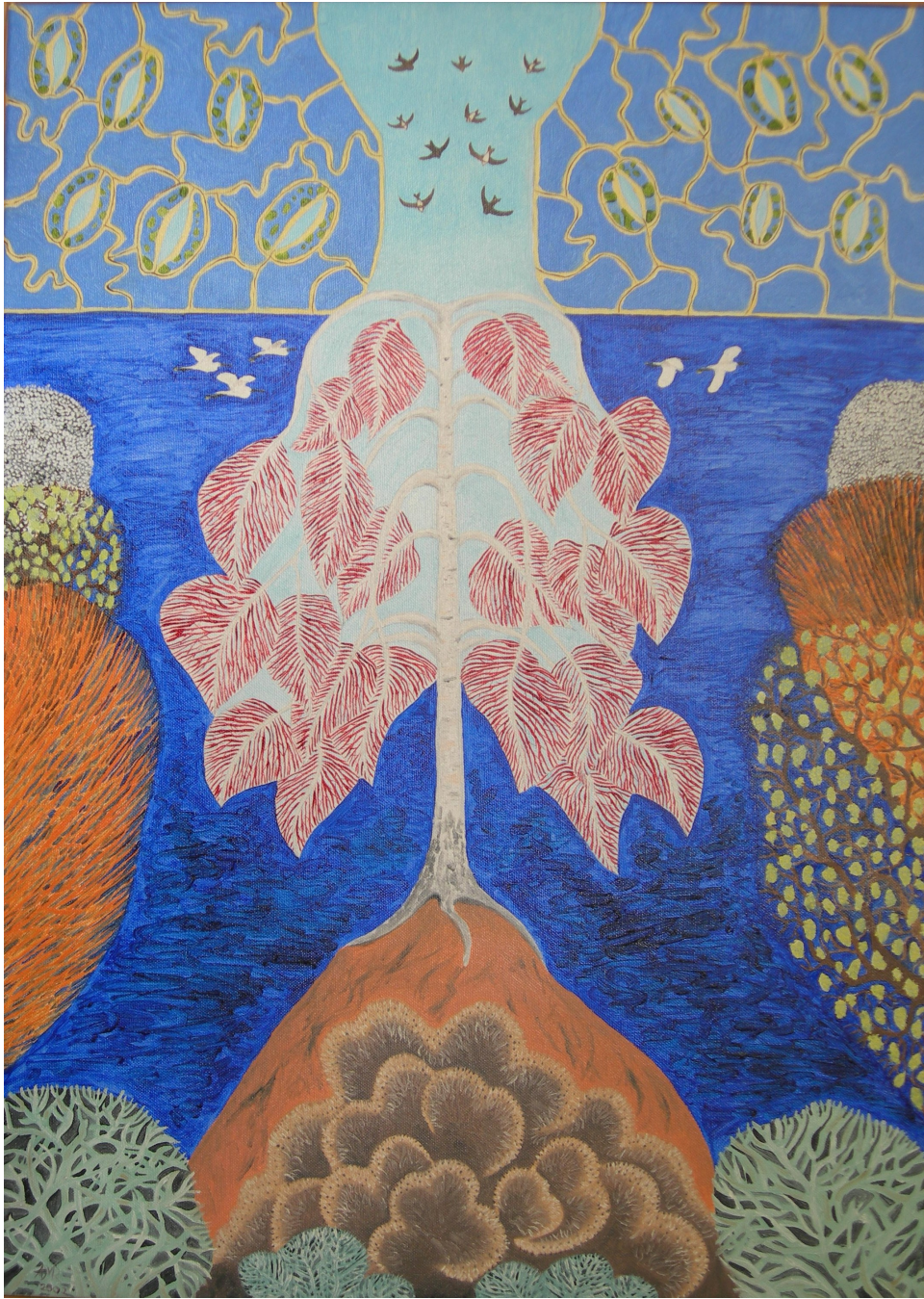
'Roller Coaster' (1998). This symbolizes a sense of inspired take-off from a deadening, purely objective view of life to a more comprehensive and fluid awareness. A ferny-feathered blue roller, streaming upwards, transforms a dusty brown study of books and analytical devices, precisely but incoherently arrayed out of perspective of table-top context, past claustrophobic, tar-spotted sycamore woodland, into an eternal quest for belonging. Bookshelves become rock strata whose caves have protected ancient scrolls through ages riven by the pain of conflicting aspirations. A sun, the magnification of hidden powdery mildew fruit bodies on the underside of green-blotched leaves casts its beauty into the eye of the beholder.



'Opening Endings' (1999). This expresses an awareness of death and decay as a vital inclusion of life, a re-opening of dynamic possibility. An elm tree's demise, its wing-barked boundaries opened by ravages of bark beetle and fungus, makes way for new life to inhabit its space. Maple leaves take over the canopy between earth and sky, but their coverage is only partial, leaving openings for arriving and departing flights of woodpeckers. Fungal decay softens the wood to allow the tunnelling of long-horn beetle larvae and probing and chiselling of beak-endings. A nest cavity provides a feeding station between egg and air.



'Future Present' (1999/2000). This expresses awareness that the diversity of life is a gift of continuous natural energy flow, to be received, sustained and passed on in dynamic relay over different scales from microcosm to macrocosm – far more than can be prescribed or contained in a rigidly defined box of genetic information alone, frozen in discontinuous time and space.



'Breathing Space' (2002). Painted in response to thoughts and images received during visits to Karlstad, Sweden and the Somerset Levels at the end of March, 2002. Spring IS Inspiring. New leaves open stomatal windows to sky. Sand Martins swirl down from migration towards water. Egrets flutter past. A white-ribbed Silver Birch, rooted to rocky diaphragm, transforms crimson lung-branches into leaves. Coral bark fires imagination. Pussy Willow erupts into incandescent catkins. Blackthorn snow-storms. Lichens pulsate with their own slow rhythm. Space permeates within, throughout and around the embodied water flows of life. Implicit Human Being. In Formational Lining. Attuned.

Alan Rayner – A Brief Biography

Alan Rayner was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1950. He obtained BA and PhD degrees in Natural Sciences at King's College, Cambridge and has been a Reader in Biology at the University of Bath.

Alan is an enthusiastic biological scientist, ecological philosopher, visual artist, poet and essayist. He has published around 160 scientific articles, Over 60 internet-downloadable essays, 7 formal academic books (including *Degrees of Freedom - Living in Dynamic Boundaries*, Imperial College Press, 1997 and *NaturesScope – Unlocking Our Natural Empathy and Creativity*, O Books, 2011), a 3 volume multi-author e-book (*Inclusionality: The Science, Art and Spirituality of Space, Place and Evolution*, 2004), and seven Internet-downloadable books (including *Inclusional Nature* and *Natural Inclusion*, 2006; *Natural Communion* and *From Emptiness to Openness*, 2008; *Limitless Pool*, 2009; *Within Reach*, 2011). He has contributed to a variety of science- and art-based TV and radio broadcasts and presented many seminars and conference papers as well as co-convening several international conferences and symposia. The latter include a pioneering Science-Art event, 'The Language of Water', which, in 2001, resulted in an acclaimed BBC Radio 4 series, 'Water Story', and in 2006 and 2007 'Unhooked Thinking I and II', two landmark conferences changing our perceptions of addiction. Since spring 2000, he has been pioneering 'natural inclusionality', a new philosophy and fluid boundary logic of self identity and ecological and evolutionary diversity and sustainability, based on awareness of how we naturally are in the world as it naturally is as energetic configurations of space.

Alan was President of the British Mycological Society in 1998 and has been a BP Venture Research Fellow and a Miller Visiting Research Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2010, and President of Bath Natural History Society in 2012. Further information and downloadable publications can be found at <http://www.spanglefish.com/exploringnaturalinclusion>.